



Girls Just Wanna have Fun...damnetal Rights – Why I Marched

Carli Rowell, Department of Sociology, University of Warwick c.r.rowell@warwick.ac.uk

As one of five girls (one sister, three step-sisters) or seven if you include two new step-nieces added to the mix my upbringing was undoubtedly feminist, although, I have only recently identified it as being so. From a young age I was told that I could be whatever I wanted to be; my parents encouraged me to confident, assertive, outgoing and above all kind to others. As a child extra curricula activities ranged from drama and dance, to being in a five aside football team, for Christmas I received both a giant size Barbie doll and a Millwall football kit. Gender neutral my upbringing was not, instead, upon reflection I have both conformed to and challenged gender stereotypes. I have been both the only girl in the graphics technology class at GCSE (my female peers studied childcare) and the one who wears false eye lashes to climb the highest free standing mountain in the world. I marched on Saturday because, until recently, as a little girl and now as a young woman I took my feminist upbringing for granted. I took it for granted that every little girl, in every household across the UK would be told that she could be whatever she wanted to be – naively, I realise now that is not the case.

As a 26-year-old in the final year of my PhD and as someone who strongly identifies as being working-class my trajectory starkly differs to those I grew up with. At a time when many of my childhood friends have children

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I am asked (innocently) by family and peers when I will get married and what my education and subsequently 'delayed' career will mean in the long term with regards to motherhood and marriage. More intimately and heartbreakingly, my partner of five years recently cited long-term compatibility concerns because of my desire for a career as he is worried, to quote 'who will look after the children'. – To echo a phrase currently circulating – 'I still can't believe we have to protest this s**t!

I marched on Saturday out of appreciation and respect for the women and men that have marched before us and who have fought tirelessly for the advancement of both women's and human rights per se. I marched because, as an ardent feminist I am all too aware of the gains and privileges that western women have been afforded due to the movements successes. Through my time teaching in Tanzania, Ghana and India, I've witnessed (albeit fleetingly) firsthand the archaic gender gap that prevails beyond the borders of Europe and the West. These experiences have served to encouraged me to fully appreciate, in the most poignant way the privileges, rights and opportunities that my geopolitical privilege and thus western feminism affords me. Although voyeuristic, it is these experiences that have served as a catalyst motivating me to fight for global gender equality, for the life I live today is due to the efforts of others. Change happens but it doesn't just happen...

I marched to honour those suffragettes whose relationships, marriages and friendships broke down as a result of their sheer participation in the movement and desire for gender equality.

I marched as a way to vent my anger and frustration at the re-emerging global rhetoric that is current seeking to assert women as the second sex, that xenophobia is tolerated and racism the norm. I marched against the normalisation of the politics of hate and white supremacy.

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I marched, but I nearly did not...

As a working-class woman my interest in politics has not been longstanding, it is only recently, since attending university that I have begun to not only think about politics, but envisage it at a public sphere that belongs to me. Long an advocate and fan of power ballads (Shania Twain being the first concert I went to as an eleven-year-old) advocating women's rights is a novel (conscious) endeavour. It is only upon perusing my PhD that I have since identified as a feminist. Working-class feminism has long been alive and well, though albeit seldom labelled as such, feminist rhetoric remains cloaked in the language of the middle classes. Overwhelmingly, those who identify as feminist do so from the position of having a university degree, perhaps we do so due to having confidence to voice our frustrations and anger, a confidence that comes part and parcel with higher education participation and its associated credentials. Beyond the aforementioned motivations for partaking on Saturday it was my desire to carve a space for working-class women within the feminist movement, to disrupt the misconception that feminism is the preserve of the (white) middle classes. That you have to have herd of and read the likes of bell Hooks; Simone de Beauvoir; Betty Friedan; Virginia Woolf; Kimberlé Williams Crenshaw; (insert prolific feminist writer here). I wanted to assert that the only prerequisite to being an advocate of women's rights and partaking in feminist activism is the belief that we were all born equal and thus should be treated as such both in practice and in law.

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